

Message Text

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ACTION AF-18

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R 311830Z MAY 74

FM AMEMBASSY BAMAKO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9084

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 BAMAKO 1424

E O 11652 GDS

TAGS: PINT, ML

SUBJ: THE CONSTITUTIONAL REFERENDUM

1. IN ONLY SIGNIFICANT POLITICAL EVENT IN MALI SINCE NOV 1968 COUP D'ETAT, MALIANS WILL VOTE IN REFERENDUM ON NEW CONSTITUTION ON SUNDAY, JUNE 2 (BAMAKO 3018). FOR PAST MONTH THE GOVERNING MILITARY COMMITTEE FOR NATIONAL LIBERATION HAS BEEN ENGAGED IN ALL-OUT CAMPAIGN FOR AFFIRMATIVE VOTE. MOST MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE HAVE BEEN IN THE VARIOUS REGIONS OF MALI CONDUCTING MARATHON RALLIES OF SUPPORT AND ANSWERING QUESTIONS ON THE NEW CONSTITUTION. (CONSEQUENCE OF ALL THIS POLITICKING IS THAT VIRTUALLY ALL DECISION-MAKING IN THE GOM HAS BEEN IN ABEYANCE FOR SEVERAL WEEKS.) AS A RESULT, WE CONFIDENTLY EXPECT AN OVERWHELMING VOTE IN SUPPORT OF THE NEW CONSTITUTION, A VOTE WHICH HAS BEEN BILLED BY THE MCNL AS A VOTE OF CONFIDENCE IN ITS RULE.

2. A DETAILED ANALYSIS OF THE NEW CONSTITUTION WILL FOLLOW SEPTTEL. BRIEFLY, HOWEVER, IT PROVIDES FOR A FIVE-YEAR TRANSITION PERIOD DURING WHICH MCNL WILL REMAIN IN POWER, AND PROHIBITS OFFICEHOLDERS UNDER PREVIOUS REGIME FROM RUNNING
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FOR OFFICE OR HOLDING POSITIONS OF RESPONSIBILITY

BILITY FOR A PERIOD OF TEN YEARS. THUS, IN SPITE OF PRESIDENT TRAORE'S STATEMENT IN HIS SPEECH ANNOUNCING THE REFERENDUM THAT THE NEW CONSTITUTION WOULD PROVIDE FOR GOVERNMENT OF THE PEOPLE, BY THE PEOPLE, AND FOR THE PEOPLE, UNIVERSAL PARTICIPATION IN THE GOVERNMENT AND A RETURN TO CONSTITUTIONAL RULE IS NOT IMMINENT.

3. THE MOTIVATION FOR HOLDING THE REFERENDUM AT THIS TIME IS NOT IMMEDIATELY APPARENT. WE ARE NOT AWARE OF ANY SIGNIFICANT AGITATION IN THE MALIAN POPULATION FOR A NEW CONSTITUTION NOR ARE WE AWARE OF ANY ACTIVE AND OVER ELEMENTS IN OPPOSITION TO THE MCNL. AT THE TIME OF ITS ASSUMPTION OF POWER, HOWEVER, THE MCNL DID PROMISE A RETURN TO CONSTITUTIONAL GOVERNMENT. FURTHER, IT SEEMS LIKELY THAT THE MCNL IS CONSCIOUS OF AND SENSITIVE TO THE FACT THAT ITS LEGITIMACY AS A GOVERNING INSTITUTION CAN BE QUESTIONED. PRESUMABLY, THEREFORE, THE MCNL IS SEEKING TO LEGITIMIZE ITSELF, TO FULFILL ITS PROMISES OF FIVE YEARS AGO AND TO DEMONSTRATE TO THE FEW VOCAL CRITICS OF ITS POLICIES THAT IT HAS THE OVERWHELMING SUPPORT OF THE MALIAN POPULATION.

4. ALTHOUGH AN AFFIRMATIVE VOTE CAN BE EXPECTED ON JUNE 2, THE EMBASSY DOUBTS THAT THIS VOTE SHOULD BE INTERPRETED AS A MANIFESTATION OF ENTHUSIASTIC POPULAR SUPPORT FOR THE PRESENT REGIME. ALTHOUGH IT IS EXTREMELY DIFFICULT TO ASSESS POLITICAL CURRENTS IN MALI BECAUSE OF THE CLOSED NATURE OF MALIAN SOCIETY, PARTICULARLY TO NON-MALIANS, AND THE GENERAL UNWILLINGNESS OF MALIANS TO DISCUSS POLITICAL MATTERS, WE BELIEVE THAT THERE ARE CERTAIN INDICATIONS OF SOME DEGREE OF DISSATISFACTION WITH THE PRESENT REGIME AND SOME DEGREE OF NOSTALGIA FOR THE DAYS OF MODIBO KEITA. THESE INDICATIONS INCLUDE THE ALMOST FRANTIC POLITICKING IN SUPPORT OF THE NEW

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CONSTITUTION BY THE COMMITTEE, A CERTAIN NUMBER OF ARRESTS OF PEOPLE PASSING OUT ANTI-MCNL LITERATURE OR VOCALLY URGING A NO-VOTE, AND THE NOTICEABLY INCREASED POLICE SURVEILLANCE IN BAMAKO IN RECENT WEEKS. FURTHER, AS PART OF THE PRO-CONSTITUTIONAL CAMPAIGN, THE GOM STAGED A RALLY AT THE MUNICIPAL STADIUM (STADE OMNISPORT) ON MAY 23. ALTHOUGH A HALF-DAY HOLIDAY WAS DECLARED

TO PERMIT PEOPLE TO ATTEND THE RALLY, FEWER THAN
5,000 PEOPLE SAT IN THE 20,000 SEAT STADIUM, MANY
OF WHICH WERE MILITARY PERSONNEL AND MOST OF THE
OTHERS WERE WOMEN AND CHILDREN.
MCGUIRE

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 BAMAKO 1424

5. THESE INDICATIONS SHOULD NOT, HOWEVER, BE
INTERPRETED AS REPRESENTING WIDESPREAD OR ACTIVE
OPPOSITION TO THE MCNL. SUCH DISSATISFACTIONS AS
EXISTS IS PROBABLY CONFINED LARGELY TO THE STUDENTS,
YOUNG BUREAUCRATS, AND PROFESSORS IN BAMAKO, AND
PERHAPS SEGOU. OUTSIDE OF THESE AREAS, IN OUR
VIEW, MOST MALIANS ARE POLITICALLY APATHETIC.
THEY WILL ALMOST CERTAINLY VOTE YES BECAUSE
OF THE ACTIVE AND WELL-ORGANIZED CAMPAIGN
WAGED BY THE GOVERNMENT AND THE LACK OF ANY
OVERT OPPOSITION. AFTER THE ELECTION, HOWEVER,
THE EMBASSY EXPECTS THINGS TO CONTINUE MUCH AS
THEY HAVE WITH THE MCNL FIRMLY IN CONTROL, THE
EFFICIENT MALIAN SECURITY ORGANIZATION DIS-
COURAGING ANY OPPOSITION ACTIVITY AND "CIVILIANI-
ZATION" PROCEEDING AT A MOST DELIBERATE PACE.
THE RESULTS OF THE REFERENDUM WILL DOUBTLESS
BE HERALDED AS PROOF OF THE DEMOCRATIC
NATURE OF THE REGIME AND ITS FOUNDATION UPON
POPULAR SUPPORT. IN THE EMBASSY VIEW, THE
REFERENDUM WILL RATHER BE A MANIFESTATION OF

MALIAN ACCEPTANCE OF THE FACT THAT THERE IS NO
VIALE ALTERNATIVE TO THE RATHER LACKLUSTRE
MCNL AND THE LACK OF CONCERN ABOUT IT.

6. A STORY MAKING THE ROUNDS IN BAMAKO PERHAPS
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BEST EXEMPLIFIES THIS ANALYSIS. A MEMBER OF THE
MCNL WAS IN A SMALL VILLAGE A FEW DAYS AGO IN
THE FIRST REGION. HE GATHERED THE VILLAGE
POPULATION AROUND AND ANNOUNCED THAT HE WAS
THERE TO EXPLAIN THE REFERENDUM. THERE WERE
LOUD SHOUTS FROM THE VILLAGERS TO THE EFFECT
THAT, "WE KNOW ALL ABOUT IT." "HOW COULD
THIS BE," SAID THE MINISTER? "NO, NO," SAID
THE VILLAGERS "WE HAVE HEARD ALL ABOUT IT--
GISCARD D'ESTAING WON."
MCGURIE

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